



November 14, 2019

Dear Members of the Concerned Clergy Coalition and Citizens of Charleston,

When I began knocking on doors, almost three years ago and after announcing my candidacy for mayor, I saw firsthand what I already knew to be true: Charleston is home to so many good, kind, caring people. The viewpoints were positive and hopeful. And almost all, without exception, believed it was possible and important to make our Capital City an even better place to work, live and raise a family.

By the end of the campaign, a year ago, I knew my success as mayor would be measured by the extent to which all the people of our city come together and strive to achieve what we all want—a safe and vibrant community. I knew I would not succeed as mayor simply by patching potholes and putting Band-Aids on the disputes of the day. To that end, I set priorities for the city and started working toward implementing new policies reflective of the values articulated to me while talking with the thousands of Charlestonians I had met.

Many of you know that I spend part of each day and evening meeting with folks at community meetings, football games, school gatherings, church and even at the grocery store. I have gone to every neighborhood and I continue to walk door-to-door because this is simply a continuation of my commitment to bring all of us together in common cause for a better Charleston. I hear thanks, admiration, and support for our police department. People recognize—as do I—that their work is difficult and dangerous. In responding to more than 71,000 calls each year, our officers go above and beyond the call of duty.

During the last few weeks, much attention was rightly drawn to the October 14, 2019, use of force by police officers restraining a young woman. Video showed multiple strikes by an officer to the woman while another officer attempted to handcuff her.

The Charleston Police Department (CPD) immediately began a use of force investigation following self-reporting by both officers involved in the incident. It is important to note that all use of force incidents are reviewed by the Professional Standards Division.

Following the incident, I, members of our administration, and CPD leadership hosted several meetings with representatives of RESET, the ACLU of West Virginia, the CARE Coalition, the Charleston Branch of the NAACP, Rise-Up, and Healthy Kids and Families, among other individuals.

Thereafter, in coordination with RESET, we convened a community forum on November 5, 2019. More than 250 people attended. I listened and learned. I said that what happened was not reflective of the values of our community. I received the letter from members of the Concerned Clergy Coalition during the forum with a requested response within ten days. Please accept this open letter as my response to your requests and other relevant matters.

By letter, Chief Smith has referred the use of force incident to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). If the FBI deems necessary, they will refer the matter to the United States Attorney or the Kanawha County Prosecuting Attorney. If at any time during the review administrative action is deemed necessary, Chief Smith will then take appropriate steps.

It was clear to me that many of the folks at the community forum were not there just because of this specific incident, but because they want to enhance the relationship between our police department and the community. Knowing the folks who live in this city as I do, I know they will do what that takes, and I am confident our police officers will as well.

To that end, and as we have stated before, during, and after the community forum, we have already started to comprehensively review the policing policies and procedures of CPD. We will engage and involve members of our community on this review team. I have asked former Charleston Police Chief Dallas Staples to help shepherd this effort, and he has agreed to do so.

The policies should provide clear guidance for our officers regarding the most effective means to resolve incidents short of a use of force; and, if the use of force is necessary, the most tactically sound and most appropriate force for the situation presented. Furthermore, I believe CPD policies—including these—should be transparently published on the CPD website.

While CPD already has regularly scheduled trainings, we are assertively looking for best practices across the country to address all areas of policing. One example is the successful “One Mind Campaign” recently announced by the International Association of Chiefs of Police. The campaign seeks to ensure successful interactions between police officers and persons affected by mental illness. I have discussed with Chief Smith my desire that CPD take the “One Mind Pledge” which includes completing the following requirements:

- Establish a clearly defined and sustainable partnership with one (or more) community mental health organization(s);
- Develop and implement a model policy addressing police response to persons affected by mental illness;
- Train and certify 100 percent of sworn officers (and selected non-sworn staff, such as dispatchers) in mental health awareness courses by:
 - Providing Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training to a minimum of 20 percent of sworn officers (and selected non-sworn staff);

- Providing Mental Health First Aid training (or equivalent) to the remaining sworn officers (and selected non-sworn staff) not receiving CIT training.

I commit to working with Charleston City Council Members to ensure the availability of all support and funding necessary for the department to meet the pledge requirements. In addition, I will work with CPD, Charleston City Council and community organizations to identify local, regional and national training opportunities to address cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and other necessary trainings.

Chief Smith and I have discussed that CPD seek and obtain accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). This will ensure that we continue to strive towards achieving the gold standard in public safety while using the most up-to-date standards for policing agencies.

I also have discussed with Chief Smith my desire that a CPD Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) be created. Members of the CAC will represent Charleston's diverse demographics and occupations. It should foster proactive relationships with an open dialogue between CPD and citizens. Members will be selected through an application process supported by strong community input. Members will participate in the Citizen's Police Academy and will be knowledgeable on CPD policies and procedures. The CAC will be the liaison between the police department and the community. They will review incidents of concern with the department and help provide guidance, support and transparency on issues related to community issues. The CAC will meet with the Chief of Police and the Deputy Chief of Police during regularly scheduled meetings in addition to urgent meetings called during times of community concern.

Please note, I forwarded your letter to Charleston City Council Members. I also forwarded it to our local statewide representatives. I included Delegate Danielle Walker, who while out of district, did attend the community forum last week. As you may know, any creation of a review board having the power to discipline officers is prohibited by West Virginia's police civil service law.

I must state the obvious. Policing is getting harder. Recruiting and retaining qualified officers is becoming more difficult. That said, I am encouraged by CPD leadership's focus on officers walking our neighborhoods and getting to know our small business owners and community members. In addition, I intend to work with Charleston City Council Members to identify additional resources to recruit, train and equip our officers, including securing funding for more body cameras.

I also ask that you recognize that each citizen owes a great debt of gratitude to the men and women of our police department. We have some of the best police officers in the country.

Finally, as we move forward, I ask of our community to continue to allow for an open dialogue on community concerns in a calm and thoughtful manner. We only bring people together when everyone is heard.

November 14, 2019

I look forward to scheduling our follow-up meeting after the first of the year.

Sincerely,



Amy Shuler Goodwin
Mayor of Charleston, West Virginia

Pat Jones
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 1

Samuel Minardi
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 15

Bobby Haas
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 2

Bobby Reishman
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 16

Chuck Overstreet
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 3

Bruce King
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 17

Tiffany Wesley Plear
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 4

Will Laird
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 18

Jeanine Faegre
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 5

Chad Robinson
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 20

Deanna McKinney
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 6

Ben Adams
Charleston City Council Member, At Large

Robert Sheets
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 8

John Kennedy Bailey
Charleston City Council Member, At Large

Mary Beth Hoover
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 9

Naomi Bays
Charleston City Council Member, At Large

Keeley Steele
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 10

Becky Ceperley
Charleston City Council Member, At Large

Joe Jenkins
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 12

Caitlin Cook
Charleston City Council Member, At Large

Brent Burton
Charleston City Council Member, Ward 13

Jennifer Pharr
Charleston City Council Member, At Large